

# Bureau of Rehabilitation Services



## 2001-2002 Annual Report



State of Connecticut



Department of Social Services

(Cover)

Dana Canevari of New Haven climbs  
the Adventure Wall at the BRS  
“Total Technology 2002” fair.  
Ms. Canevari is the technology  
coordinator at the Disability  
Resource Center of Fairfield County  
in Stratford.

**Bureau of Rehabilitation Services  
Connecticut Department of Social Services**

**2001-2002 Annual Report**

***A Message from the Director:***

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) is a recognized leader in the provision of disability programs for Connecticut's citizens with physical, mental, sensory and intellectual disabilities. This 2002 Annual Report presents the achievements of the Bureau's programs, which assist our consumers to achieve and maintain economic self-sufficiency and full independence in their communities. These programs include:

***The Vocational Rehabilitation Program  
Disability Determination Services  
The Connect To Work Center  
The Employment Opportunities Program  
The Connecticut Tech Act Project  
The Independent Living Program***

The Bureau's challenge for the future is to continue our tradition of innovation, creativity, and excellent customer service, to ensure that Connecticut's citizens with disabilities have access to the most effective and state-of-the-art programs.

Economic self-sufficiency, community independence, public-private partnerships and customer satisfaction will continue to be the primary goals of the programs of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services.

As we look towards the future, the scope and types of services offered through the Bureau's programs will continue to evolve, reflecting the changing fiscal, economic and programmatic climate. As always, our primary challenge will be to design programs that give citizens with disabilities a meaningful array of choices through which to achieve their independent living and economic goals.

The Bureau will continue to be a leader in the field of rehabilitation. We will maximize our effectiveness by providing required services in a manner that builds upon the creativity and innovative spirit of individuals with disabilities. In order to achieve the Bureau's goals, we will work to bring consumers, their families, Bureau staff, and our public and private partners together in a productive and meaningful collaboration.

***John F. Halliday, Director  
Bureau of Rehabilitation Services***

## *The Vocational Rehabilitation Program*

*Between October 1, 2001 and September 30, 2002:*

- 1,649 consumers successfully completed services in employment.
- 99% of those were in competitive employment:
  - earning an average hourly wage of \$12.20;
  - working an average of 30 hours per week.
- Nearly 800 individuals advanced from being dependent on public benefits or their families to being economically self-supporting.

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) is the primary employment program of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services. The focus of VR is to assist individuals with significant disabilities to attain economic independence by preparing for, finding, and maintaining employment in the community.

An individual who has a significant disability which poses a barrier to employment, and who requires services in order to attain or maintain employment, will be eligible for the VR program. Vocational rehabilitation counselors and other Bureau staff are available in more than 20 locations throughout the state. They work in partnership with individuals or groups to help consumers discover their strengths and limitations as they relate to work. To assist individuals in making informed choices, VR counselors offer career exploration and counseling, and vocational information.

An Individualized Employment Plan (IEP) is developed when the consumer and the Bureau agree upon an employment goal and the services needed to achieve that goal. In addition to career counseling, the IEP may

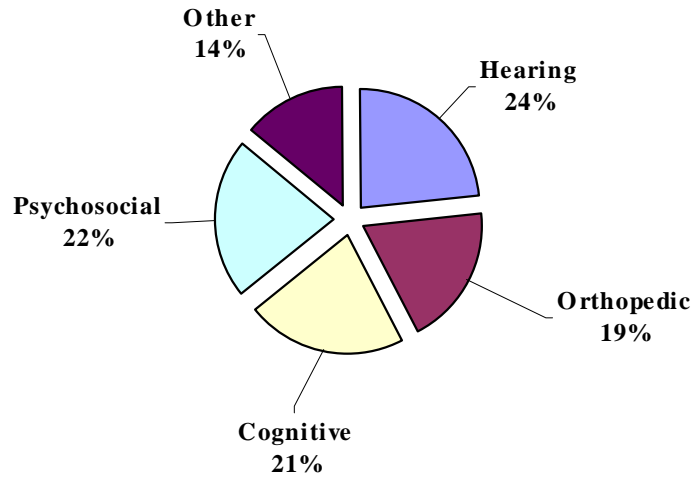
include education and training, functional/physical restoration, adaptive technology, job placement assistance and supports, or a variety of other vocational rehabilitation services needed for the individual to reach his or her employment goal.

The key to success in the VR program is the relationship between the consumer and the vocational rehabilitation counselor or other Bureau staff.

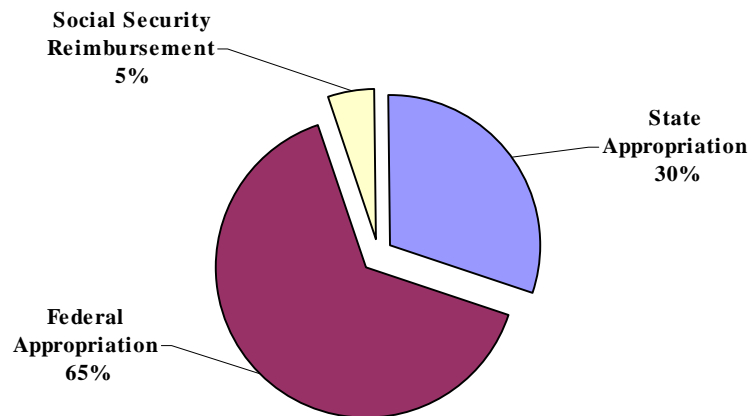
For more information about the Vocational Rehabilitation program, and to obtain a list of the offices of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, call 1-800-537-2549 (voice) or (860) 424-4839 (TDD).

Information is also available via e-mail by contacting [evelyn.knight@po.state.ct.us](mailto:evelyn.knight@po.state.ct.us), and by visiting the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services web site at [www.brs.state.ct.us](http://www.brs.state.ct.us).

**Individuals Employed by Disability Type**  
**October 1, 2001 - September 30, 2002**  
**(n=1,649)**



**Appropriations by Funding Source SFY 2002**  
**(Total=\$23,412,539)**



## *The State Rehabilitation Council*

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) provides assessment, advice and recommendations to the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services regarding the Vocational Rehabilitation program.

### *2002 Council accomplishments include:*

- Developing, in collaboration with the Connect to Work Center, a resource manual of state councils which advocate for persons with disabilities.
- Analyzing the implications of the April 2001 consumer satisfaction survey and planned for the second phase of this survey.
- Offering financial and in-kind support for the Youth Leadership Forum, which seeks to develop leadership among young people with disabilities.
- Developing procedures regarding the small business start-up program; worked with BRS district and local offices to ensure small business training.
- Working with BRS staff to implement the VR state plan.
- Implementing a partnership plan to improve communication between the Council and BRS field staff.

### *2003 Council goals include:*

- Assisting with the implementation and review of the October 2002 consumer satisfaction survey of those receiving vocational rehabilitation services.
- Linking with the Bureau's Connect to Work Center, to provide input and gather information on disability benefits in relation to employment for persons with disabilities.
- Providing training to create an infrastructure to support the Council's legislative activity.
- Working with BRS staff to develop a new VR state plan, including reviewing the updates to the plan, providing input, and holding a public forum on the plan.
- Continuing to develop the council resource manual, in collaboration with the Connect to Work Center.

For information on the State Rehabilitation Council, call 1-800-537-2549 (voice) or (860) 424-4839 (TDD). Information is also available via e-mail at [evelyn.knight@po.state.ct.us](mailto:evelyn.knight@po.state.ct.us), and by visiting the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services web site at [www.brs.state.ct.us](http://www.brs.state.ct.us).

## *Disability Determination Services*

Between October 1, 2001 and September 30, 2002, staff of the Disability Determination Services (DDS) unit adjudicated a total of 35,460 claims for Social Security disability benefits.

### *This included:*

- 15,937 claims for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits;
- 13,466 claims for Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI) benefits; and
- 6,057 concurrent claims for SSDI and SSI.

### *During this period:*

- the average case processing time was 75 days; and
- the accuracy rate was 96 percent.

The SSDI and SSI programs provide cash benefits to individuals who are currently unable to engage in gainful employment.

After a year of challenges, including a 12 percent increase in new Social Security disability applications (more than 4,000 claims), heightened program standards, and increasing fiscal constraints, the DDS takes pride in having processed 105 percent of its targeted workload. This translated into timely decisions for the citizens of Connecticut who file for Social Security disability benefits.

## *The Connect To Work Center*

The Connect to Work Center was established in May 2001 to support the employment of persons with disabilities in the competitive labor force.

- Between October 1, 2001 and September 30, 2002, the Center's benefits specialists assisted 933 individuals with disabilities, providing information on various benefit programs, including programs which offer employment incentives.
- Since its inception in October 2000, the Medicaid for the Employed Disabled Program enrolled 2,267 individuals, demonstrating the potent employment incentive offered by this program.

### *Achievements during the second project year included:*

- Continuing to provide a single access point for information and assistance around benefits and services, connecting the key components of employment, health care, and benefits counseling;
- Providing training, public education and outreach around benefits and services offered within the State of Connecticut, with a particular emphasis on the Medicaid for the Employed Disabled Program; and
- Conducting policy review and development to enhance opportunities for individuals with disabilities to enter the labor force.

More information is available by contacting the Connect to Work Center at (800) 773-4636 (voice), (860) 424-4839 (TTY), or by e-mail at [connecttowork.dss@po.state.ct.us](mailto:connecttowork.dss@po.state.ct.us).



## *The Employment Opportunities Program*

The Employment Opportunities Program (EOP) enables individuals with the most significant disabilities to engage in competitive employment by assisting those who, after completing intensive VR services, need long-term supports in order to maintain competitive employment. In 2002, the EOP served 271 individuals.

### *Between July 1, 1991 and June 30, 2002:*

- The number of participants in community-based employment nearly quadrupled, while the number of persons in individual competitive jobs increased nearly eightfold.
- Average weekly wages increased from \$61 per week to \$176 per week; the average weekly wage for participants who started the program after July 1991 is \$183 per week.
- The number of participants increased by 81 percent.
- The average annual cost per participant decreased by 48 percent, from a high of more than \$11,000 in 1991 to approximately \$5,600.

The EOP is structured so that the job supports needed by individuals with significant disabilities are customized to meet their particular employment needs. To be eligible for the program, individuals must be (1) ineligible for long-term funding supports from other public agencies, and (2) competitively employed in a job located in the community.

The key to the success of the EOP lies in the partnership it has fostered among consumers, BRS counselors, business and industry, and community-based providers of employment services.

## *The Connecticut Tech Act Project*

The primary purpose of the Connecticut Tech Act Project, now in its tenth year, is to make assistive technology more accessible to persons with disabilities living in Connecticut.

*Major accomplishments of the past year include the following:*

- The Assistive Technology Loan Program continued to grow, having provided in excess of \$2 million to more than 200 individuals, since its inception in 1993. This program provides low-interest loans to individuals with disabilities to purchase technology that enhances their independence of function.
- The project's web site was consulted by more than 80,000 people during FFY 2002.
- More than 1,100 individuals attended the biannual Tech Fair, held in October 2002. This year's fair expanded in scope, offering more vendors, activities and speakers than ever before.

The project also provided critical support for the development of the New England Assistive Technology (NEAT) Marketplace in Hartford, which recycles and offers demonstration and training on various types of assistive technology. Assistive technology is defined as equipment, whether acquired "off the shelf" or customized, that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of an individual with a disability.

To contact the Connecticut Tech Act Project, call 1-800-537-2549 (voice) or (860) 424-4839 (TDD), e-mail to [evelyn.knight@po.state.ct.us](mailto:evelyn.knight@po.state.ct.us), or visit the project's web site at [www.techactproject.com](http://www.techactproject.com).

## *Independent Living Program*

The Bureau's Independent Living (IL) program provides comprehensive independent living services to persons with significant disabilities, through contracts with Connecticut's five community-based independent living centers (ILCs).

### *Working with the State Independent Living Council (SILC), the IL program:*

- Provided core independent living services to more than 850 individuals.
- Transitioned 28 individuals from nursing facilities to the community.
- Provided \$10,000 to each ILC, to enable consumers to purchase services identified in their Independent Living Plans, but which are not readily available.
- Allocated \$30,000 to each ILC to supplement state and federal dollars, for the provision of core services.
- Provided \$2,000 to each ILC, to improve access to IL services for individuals who are deaf.

The goal of the independent living program is to promote full integration and inclusion into the mainstream. With support from BRS, the independent living centers offer four core independent living services:

- *peer support;*
- *information and referral;*
- *individual and systems advocacy; and*
- *independent living skills training*

For a list of Connecticut's independent living centers, go to the BRS web site, at [www.brs.state.ct.us](http://www.brs.state.ct.us), or call (800) 537-2549. To contact the SILC, call (860) 656-0430, or e-mail [ctsilc@megahits.com](mailto:ctsilc@megahits.com).

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